

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Sacramento  
March 1954

HONORABLE HAROLD J. POWERS, PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE  
and  
HONORABLE JAMES W. SILLIMAN, SPEAKER OF THE ASSEMBLY

Pursuant to Division 5, Part 1, Chapter 2, Article 1.3 Section 3211 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, the Coordinating Council on State Programs for the Blind herewith submits to the Legislature its second annual report covering the period from July 1, 1952 to June 30, 1953.

Copies of this report are being forwarded to the State Board of Social Welfare, the State Board of Education; and the State Board of Public Health.

We believe the work of the council continues to further the principle contained in the statute creating the council; namely, provide for the coordination of the functions and programs of the various state departments insofar as such functions and programs affect the adult blind.

We trust this report will be of assistance to the Legislature.

Respectfully submitted,

COORDINATING COUNCIL ON STATE PROGRAMS  
FOR THE BLIND

Wilton L. Halverson, M.D., Director  
State Department of Public Health

Charles I. Schottland, Director  
State Department of Social Welfare

Roy E. Simpson, Director  
State Department of Education

## SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

### COORDINATING COUNCIL ON STATE PROGRAMS FOR THE BLIND

#### Membership, Functions, and Organization of the Council

During the twelve-month period covered by this report, the membership of the council was the same as during the preceding year:

Wilton L. Halverson, M. D.  
Director, State Department of Public Health

Charles I. Schottland  
Director, State Department of Social Welfare

Roy E. Simpson  
Director, State Department of Education

The functions and organization of the council continued as described in the First Annual Report, with the Coordinating Committee on State Services for the Blind as a working committee reporting to the council at its regular quarterly meetings.

#### Review of the Current Status of State Programs for the Blind

##### I Programs administered or supervised by the Department of Social Welfare

California has three Social Welfare Programs for the Blind: Aid to Needy Blind, Aid to Partially Self-supporting Blind Residents, and Prevention of Blindness. The county welfare departments administer the two Aid to the Blind programs under the supervision of the State Department of Social Welfare. The State Department of Social Welfare administers the Prevention of Blindness program with the cooperation of the county welfare departments.

The purpose of granting Aid to Needy Blind is to relieve blind persons from the distress of poverty, to enlarge the economic opportunities of the blind, and to stimulate the blind to greater efforts in striving to render themselves self-supporting. In June 1953, there were 11,301 recipients of Aid to Needy Blind.

The purpose of granting Aid to Partially Self-supporting Blind Residents is to provide a plan for this state whereby the blind residents of this state may be encouraged to take advantage of and to enlarge their economic opportunities, to the end that they may render themselves independent of public assistance and become entirely self-supporting. In June 1953, there were 491 recipients of Aid to Partially Self-supporting Blind Residents.

The chief problem created for most men and women who lose their vision is to find a way to provide themselves with the necessities of life. In June 1953, 11,792 blind persons were receiving financial assistance in the form of Aid to the Blind. This has been estimated to constitute about one-half of the total blind population of the state.

The Prevention of Blindness program is a service to persons whose eye condition can be improved by treatment. Such persons must, in general, meet the eligibility requirements of the Aid to the Blind laws. Visual impairment need not



come within the definition of economic blindness, since the purpose of the program is to prevent individuals from becoming blind as well as to restore sight. During the year 1952-53 there were 185 persons receiving this service in 34 counties of the state.

All three Social Welfare Programs for the Blind are geared to encourage the rehabilitation of sightless men and women by assisting them to achieve physical, social, and economic adjustment - thus reducing dependency and enriching the lives of these persons. First, financial assistance is provided for the purpose of purchasing the basic needs of life. Second, blind persons who are able and willing to try to achieve self-support are given encouragement through generous exempt-income provisions. Finally, the special provision for eye care service is available to all applicants and recipients who have an eye condition in which treatment may either restore vision or prevent further loss of sight.

## II Programs administered or supervised by the Department of Education

1. Home teaching for preschool blind children and their parents: The purpose of this program is to guide and assist parents who must meet the unusual problem of rearing a blind child. Under the supervision of the Superintendent of the California School for the Blind, selected teachers visit the homes at regular intervals and help the parents to meet the special needs of these children. In June 1953, there were 207 blind preschool children receiving this service.
2. Special education for blind children of school age: Through this program the state provides a means by which blind children may complete elementary and secondary schooling, orientation to daily living, and limited prevocational training. As of June, 1953, there were approximately 350 blind children of school age enrolled in special classes. Of these, 160 were in residence at the California School for the Blind at Berkeley, and 190 attended special day schools or classes in local districts.
3. Reader service for blind college students: For blind persons regularly enrolled in colleges or universities in the state, and whose educational qualifications have been approved by the Director of Advanced Studies at the California School for the Blind, the state provides limited funds for reader services. In June, 1953, there were 81 blind college students receiving this assistance.
4. Orientation and prevocational training for blind adults: This program is carried on at the Oakland Orientation Center to give to recently blinded men and women intensive training in basic reorientation in attitudes as well as in techniques of living and working without sight. Although this recently established service is just now getting under way, it shows great promise as a foundation for rehabilitation of the blind. As of June 1953, the trainees enrolled had been 38 persons from 15 counties.
5. Vocational rehabilitation of blind adults: The Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation provides counseling, physical restoration, vocational training, and job placement for blind adults. During the year ending in June 1953, the Rehabilitation Officers for the Blind served 405 blind clients and completed 193 job placements.
6. Field service for the blind: This is primarily a social service program for helping elderly blind persons adjust themselves to living without sight at home and in the community. The services performed by the field workers include

counseling with the client and with the family, instruction in handicrafts, instruction in Braille reading and writing. The field workers serve, also, as the distribution agents for the phonographs, talking books records, and Braille literature supplied through the State Library. Frequently the field worker takes the lead in organizing for the blind client special opportunities for social participation in the community. Sometimes the field worker is an important factor in arranging the first steps toward vocational rehabilitation. During the year ending June 30, 1953, the field workers served 2,015 clients.

7. State-subsidized workshops for blind adults: Under the name: "California Industries for the Blind" the state maintains three sheltered workshops for blind adults. These are located in Oakland, Los Angeles, and San Diego. During the year ending June 30, 1953, work opportunity in these shops was given to 362 blind persons.

### III Programs administered or supervised by the Department of Public Health

1. Programs directed at the prevention of diseases or hazards which may result in blindness:
  - a. Syphilis and gonorrhea; ophthalmia neonatorum
  - b. Acute infectious diseases
  - c. Premature birth
  - d. Occupational hazards
  - e. Home Safety Program
2. The program of services to physically handicapped children provides early diagnosis and treatment of conditions leading to loss of vision in children.

### Review of Items Considered

Of the questions and problems submitted by the Coordinating Committee, and discussed by the council, the more important were:

1. Continued high incidence of blindness among premature infants. Of over 400 blind children of preschool age currently served by home teachers in California, approximately 65% were blinded by retrolental fibroplasia. The Department of Public Health is continuing its special effort to reduce the number of premature births in the state; but, unless some method of preventing such blindness is discovered, the number of blind children requiring special educational facilities will increase significantly during the next few years.

Retrolental fibroplasia is a disease of the eye which affects prematurely-born infants, and which results in blindness in a large number of these babies. This condition was unknown fifteen years ago, but has been rapidly increasing since. It is thought to be related in some way to some change which has taken place over the past decade in the medical management of premature infants; currently there is a good deal of evidence associating this condition with the amount or method of administration of oxygen to these small babies. Since oxygen is often life-saving, it is important to identify the precise factor of dosage which is related to retrolental fibroplasia.



A committee composed of the heads of the departments of obstetrics, ophthalmology, and pediatrics of the five medical schools in this state has worked with the department to draw up a plan for a cooperative study, involving all five schools. Because of the need for close observation of these infants, and especially because of the need for frequent determinations of the oxygen content of the incubator, funds will need to be secured if this study is to take place. It is hoped that this can be carried on and financed as part of the project for the prevention of blindness, mentioned below, which will, it is hoped, be financed by a grant from the Kellogg Foundation.

2. Increasing Adult Blind Population. Recent estimates indicate that during the past five years the number of blind men and women in California has increased in proportion to the increase in total population, and is now approximately 19,000. According to a recent bulletin issued by the American Foundation for the Blind, 12%, or 2,880 of this number may become employable in industry, business, or a profession, if given suitable training. In this connection, the council noted with approval the increasing number of blind adults being served at the Oakland Orientation Center for the Blind; and the increasing number of job placements of blind persons reported by the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation.
3. The Need for a Study of the Causes of Blindness. The council discussed and approved a study being made by the Department of Social Welfare to determine the causes of blindness as recorded for applicants for Aid to the Blind in California. It is hoped that such a study may lead to a more effective coordinated approach to the prevention of blindness, in which not only the several state departments but also physicians, local health agencies, and civic groups will participate.
4. Project for the Prevention of Blindness. The State Department of Public Health has drafted a proposal to establish a pilot project for the prevention of blindness, for which it is hoped that funds can be obtained from the Kellogg Foundation. Activities in this project would include an investigation of the prevalence and incidence of the various forms of blindness and precursors of blindness, epidemiological studies of certain conditions leading to loss of vision, and the establishment of a preventive program, operated as a demonstration for a specified period of time, concluding with an evaluation. The ultimate purpose would be to identify those activities through which a health department might practically and economically prevent loss of vision.

On the basis of information now available, it is believed that such a program could materially reduce the number of people blinded by glaucoma, retrolental fibroplasia, and accidents.

The project has been submitted to representatives of the California Medical Association for their advice and counsel. These discussions are still under way; and the formal submission of the project to the Kellogg Foundation will be made after these discussions have resulted in general agreement.

5. Ways to Facilitate Prompt Inter-Agency Referrals for Blind Clients. An agreement for referral of those blind persons who appear to have potential for becoming self-supporting is under consideration between the Division for the Blind, State Department of Social Welfare, the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, Field Services for Adult Blind, and the Orientation and Training Center, State Department of Education. The Division for the Blind will continue to provide a list of all applicants for aid each month to Field

Services for Adult Blind which will contact each of these persons and make available this state's rich resources for the blind. The Division for the Blind will also refer on a selected basis those persons seeming to have a potential for self-support so that additional information can be secured before a final referral is made to the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation. It is hoped that in this way more blind people can be helped in their efforts and desire to become self-sustaining citizens in their communities.

Items to be Considered during the Year 1953-54

At its regular meetings during 1953-54, the council will continue to give special consideration to:

- (a) The ways in which the incidence of blindness in California may be reduced,
- (b) The development of home teacher service and special class service to meet the needs of the rapidly growing number of blind children in the state.
- (c) The ways in which the state program for the rehabilitation and job placement of blind adults may be further improved.

The council will give attention, also, to the reports and problems presented by the Co-ordinating Committee. Some of the items which have been suggested as worthy of consideration are:

- (a) How to further develop the state program for sight restoration.
- (b) How to recruit blind persons to enter the social work field, particularly to carry on the administration of the Aid to the Blind programs.
- (c) What are the purposes and plans for the development of "Opportunity Centers" for the blind in California?

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